

May is Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month

Written by Mike Honda
Thursday, 21 May 2009 19:00

Viral hepatitis is the most common blood-borne illness in the world. Billions of people have been infected with acute hepatitis and hundreds of millions are infected with chronic hepatitis. Chronic viral hepatitis B & C infections are “silent diseases” because frequently, those infected have no obvious symptoms. Without appropriate screening and management of the disease, chronic viral hepatitis carriers frequently die from liver cancer and can pass on the infection to others.

Each May, we observe Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month. I urge all my constituents to take the message of this month to heart, be tested for viral hepatitis and be inoculated against hepatitis B if they have not done so already. It is important to know your status in order to protect your own health and the health of your loved ones.

Although viral hepatitis affects every racial and ethnic group in this country, there are serious disparities in infection rates among many minority communities. For example, in the U.S., as many as 1 in 10 Asian Pacific Islander Americans are chronically infected with the hepatitis B virus and hepatitis C infection is 2 to 3 times more prevalent among African Americans as it is among Caucasians. Increased awareness, education, and screening are critical to ending health disparities.

On May 19th, 2009 I introduced a [resolution](#) supported by 30 other members of Congress calling for a robust governmental and public health response to stem the tide of viral hepatitis, domestically and internationally. As a long-term plan, I am working with Representative Edolphus Towns on a bill that would create a national strategy to deal with hepatitis B and C.

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President Obama issued a letter on Tuesday, May 19th, World Hepatitis Day, recognizing the public health danger presented by viral hepatitis and commending the advocate community for raising awareness about the disease. I am gratified that the President recognizes the gravity of the situation and hope that his support will help us in our fight to increase funding at the Center for Disease Control's Division of Viral Hepatitis.

[[Learn more about viral hepatitis](#)]